Reclaiming the stolen honey

Karen Jean Robert

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RECLAIMING THE STOLEN HONEY

By
Karen Karvonen Robert
B.A., University of Massachusetts, 1971
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Approved by:

Madeline DeFree
Chairperson, Board of Examiners

Dean, Graduate School

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# Table of Contents

## Reclaiming the Stolen Honey

### I. Reclaiming the Stolen Honey 1-8
- Flight for Ariel 1
- The First Gods 3
- Mother 4
- Homo Misericors 5
- Politics of Machinery 6
- What Does M.F.A. Stand For? 7
- The Island of Men/An Ocean of Women 8

### II. Planting the Red Mare 9-12
- Reading My Tarot 9
- The Spirit Must Not Be Broken But Slowly Melted As River Ice Trickles Into Supple Water 10
- Trust 11
- Photo of My New England Neighbor's House 12

### III. A Crack in History 13-15
- Relativity 13
- The Man Who Tracked Dinosaurs 14
- LaBrea 15

### IV. Kites 17-23
- To My Sister Looking Into My Mirror 17
- Kites 18
- When the Cows Broke 19
- For My Father Drowned July 27, 1968 20
- Drowning With My Mother 21
- Woodruff Island 22
- Between Mountains 23

### V. The Gentleman Caller - A One Act Play 24 24-59
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RECLAIMING THE STOLEN HONEY
FLIGHT FOR ARIEL

unwrapping
the yellow-jacket buds
your zipper sticks
then pulls a yellow ripple
across the porcelain face

gobble, gobble
the red welt jostles
under your chin
the blue nipples of gas
swell and ripen
We caress under the hood

prodigious
the bees spur
to reclaim the stolen honey
lapping, snapping, snarling
through the picket fence
I cut the soft bee
jewels to fit over your eyes
drunk
your lips pout
over the blue bubbles of milk
slosh slosh into the pan
I draw the poem's stinger out

Lowell's eyes bead
squirming with your image
your goblin
poems open
in silent howls

I can close your lips
now darling
I can tell
by the way
your breath dances out
your are ready
to take to the air.
THE FIRST GODS

"unless a woman has that cold
fire in her called poet"
Denise
Levertov

They did not believe me
because I was a woman who spoke to thunder
a woman who stood out against lightning.

I lit fires on the hills and let the branches
burn orange all night.

I am opening graves tonight
taking out your bones
and drumming, drumming
the silence into life.
MOTHER

Mother, this is the night
we begin breathing through gills
in the earth. You break
out of the white veil
and spread your umbrella sides.
I open along all the pores
in my white arm, flow out
and harden like a jellyfish
that spawns in the earth.

Mother this is the night
we melt our wedding bands
into fool's gold,
we throw our diamonds
back into the holes of the earth,
we close our eyes
and remember the first time
we kicked inside our mother
and the cry she gave us.

Mother, I am frightened
the cycle of birth is broken,
mothers have forgotten the old songs
they sang to their children,
even you sang me no songs of delivery,
of women who broke ground
with their arms and their tongues,
the religion you gave me was false
I grew up a guilty virgin
praying to a surrogate son.

I will have no children
because the songs I would sing them
are lost, because the ways I would
bring them up in are gone.
Mother, I will have no children
because the birthright we claim
has been stolen.
Women have sold the earth into slavery.
Children have forgotten the line of
birth connecting us all.
Mother, I am no longer a giver.
I have taken more than my share.
This earth and I can no longer
give back in children.
HOMO MISERICORS

for Terry

I know your wife
is a mental stranger.
She wedges CRIME AND PUNISHMENT
between the headboard and the wall
to stop the bed from squeaking.
She slips LADY CHATTERLEY’S LOVER
under the leg of your daughter’s dresser
to keep the bureau from tipping.
She crams THE NAKED LUNCH
into the hole behind the refrigerator
to keep the cat from peeing.
She prises the wedding band off her finger,
rests it on the shelf,
and washes dishes

Your skin is becoming a map I can read.
Your blood is lapping slower.
When you wake in the middle of the bed,
your heart strikes through your chest
like a bell.

I know your children
grow inside your head
like seahorses swelling
the father's womb,
contrary sons
daughters who expose their radical symmetry.
Cronus swallowed his rebellious children
one by one, and vomited them whole.
Every child who comes
out of his father's belly
should feel the hole.
The Shoshone men know
when a childbirth is upon them.
Their loins contract in labor.
Their muscles force the polliwog,
that grew lungs,
sprouted hair,
evolved opposing thumbs,
a bulging cerebrum
down the birth canal.
Women should never handle machinery, planers, and presses, drills and lathes, axes and bits bite off the thimble finger, pinch nipples and breasts, saw off a nicely turned leg, radiate the tender uterus.

My mother caught her left breast in the wringer while squeezing the rinse water out of my father's underwear. Twenty years later the surgeon pares the cancer out of her left chest.

At two I slapped my palm flat on the baking door, scorched my life line, blistered the heart. Today I carry no scar but check the flesh for some bizarre line of early death twenty children.

Women should never handle such dangerous machinery as high cycle washers, ten speed blenders, gas powered ovens. I will not touch a sewing machine, feel the endless thrust of that nervous needle piercing bolt after bolt of polka dot, jean while I feel my knee into the pedal.

But I will touch the electrode handle, unclamp the toothed jaws and insert the steel rod. Under the dark hood I strike the green arc, draw a curving well of molten beads across the plate. In the electric flash when the rod first bears its 80 amps of weight, I shake, and then press the liquid tip into the crater.

Women should never expose themselves to the shock of running a planer, welding a joint, as good as, sometimes better than a man. Such machinery is dangerous, and better kept locked in those secret drawers, behind steel cabinets clearly marked, MEN.
WHAT DOES M.F.A. STAND FOR?

Please, miss
force yourself
to relax
don't let us
young and old
hip dudes
intimidate
your cute little ass

After all, Honey
this is not a rape.

Our boys
will be very careful
not to look you
directly in the face.

Please, miss
force yourself
to relax
don't fight
our polite
gropes

After all, Honey
this is not
your ordinary
fraternal
gang-bang rape.

Our boys
will be very careful
not to leave
a trace.

Please, miss
suppress your hysteria
the sign
above
the director's door
is your paranoia

WOMAN:
THE STAFF AND MANAGEMENT
WISHES YOU
NOT TO KNOW
YOU REALLY DON'T
BELONG HERE

PLEASE COOPERATE!

Please, miss
force yourself
to relax
your anger
is inappropriate

After all, Honey
this is strictly
your own
imaginary rape.

The gag
we use
is invisible
Women
never even feel
when we slip
it into place.

So please, miss,
relax
and cooperate

Imagine
how foolish
you'd feel
if you read this poem
aloud in class
and we smug
hip dudes
silently laughed
in your face.
THE ISLAND OF MEN/AN OCEAN OF WOMEN

There is no monster within me
no nettled woman with thorned hair,
with those legendary nipples that suckled
wolves, and a fabled cunt lined
with a double reach of teeth.

No wild woman grows hysterical in my womb,
turns ulcerous in my belly, gapes my throat,
and works my mouth into an ugly shout.
I do not keep such a woman inside.
I let her out, give the preying lady
the air to stalk the beach, to poise
resolute as a blade of holy grass
still as a sundew leaf for fools
who thought when we clasped our hands
submissively and closed our eyes,
we saw carpeted patios, whitewalled
kitchens, pink cheeked babies, side
burned husbands.

I tell you this woman watches
the black fungus double its weight
every two hours. She watches
the streptococcus bloom on the swollen
throats of the blue suited orators.
She watches the purple ergot
enter the flowering rye. She watches
and waits for your own poison to take
for your own weight to topple you over.

When I walk the beach at night
with the women who answer my cry
we call in each wave with our song.
We sing all night. We sing with the moon.
We sing to the umbrella of jellyfish,
to the maiden crabs, to the widow
clams, to the necklace of baby
conch shells. We sing of water
foaming at our feet, tugging us
over our heads, lifting us a mile
above the beaches, where the waves
slowly swallow the island of men.
PLANTING THE RED MARE
READING MY TAROT

for Cynthia

The matter at hand is the emperor overthrown, but the matter is clouded for the emperor has abdicated his throne. He calls out from his tower. "See, there's no one to oppose. Leave me alone." He rattles his keys in my face. "They open nothing, nothing, but doors. Go home."

I sharpen my sword. I am the new influence on the matter, the grinning sword that cuts through the path of smiles with its own slicing song. I want to talk to the emperor alone, but the emperor has flown. I sit in the vacant throne.

I am crossed by the bound man, the blind woman, the deaf and the mute who ignore what the blindfolds conceal, who consider existence preferable in any suit. While I demand my own deck. I want to shuffle myself.

The cards will settle the outcome. This hand will turn up the pentacled queen, who sets her dark body in the earth, then bursts out of seed, out of shells, out of rock; Her arms unfold in the sun. She can never be plucked.

Her lap ripens fruit. She holds the stars in her hoops and sings her song into the earth,

"I give without miracle,
I take without force.
I plant the red mare,
I reap the white horse."
THE SPIRIT MUST NOT BE BROKEN
BUT SLOWLY MELTED
AS RIVER ICE TRICKLES INTO
SUPPLE WATER

When you told me
the red mare waters
where the river drops
to its knees in chokecherry
vines, I nibbled the sour
berries, arrow-tipped
asparagus, curving balsam
root till the smell
of stickroasting rabbit
left my breath. I braided
the half moon of her nostrils
into the rawhide hackmore,
climbed above the river
until the mare brushed
her belly under me. I leapt
rooting my fingers in her mane.
She sprang up, dancing
on hindlegs, lashing out
at the dried grass moon.
The river curled its white lips.
We plunged into the cold
blood of fish. I slipped
the hackmore over her nose,
tied the doeskin across her eyes.
Softly I rubbed the red pine
needles into her coat
and spoke in the white
chinook voice until
the trembling stopped.
TRUST

walking through
the green insides
of the forest

where the leaves
lick
my bare arms

and the star moss
nuzzles
my open toes

I feel
like a cherished toy
being carried
in the open jaws
of a soft young animal.
In the white grain and black relief house
where the flowering dogwood is cropped off,
Mrs. Hubbard lures the white pheasant
to the pine feeding trough.

I scratch dead leaves
out of her wisteria and lilac,
sip her bone china tea
scoop peach ice cream from the dasher.

She leans back into her mother's wood stove kitchen,
wrinkles her nose at the three hog's heads
boiling all day into cheese, the 12 pink knuckles
force fed into her father's favorite brine.

In the oak bedroom upstairs she gave birth
to her only son, watched the Polish women
plant potato fields with yesterday's newborn
slung in wicker cradles.

Grace carved sweet alyssum borders,
yellow hollyhock beds, and lacy scrolls
of pale blue and white columbine
until her eyes blurred with cataracts,

And her husband staggered blue-faced
from the barn to the hospital
to the freshly banked lot
in the old slate cemetery.

She cut the flowers back,
canned a rash of mint jelly,
and pointed out slide after slide of their '52 trip
to Sequoia, Vancouver, and the high Banff Country.

When I leave, Grace
presses the warming stone into my hand,
closes my fingers, and guides me
across the floor beams
she has settled these sixty years
since Arthur lifted her
over the threshold
into the black framed, white adobe house.
A CRACK IN HISTORY
RELATIVITY

We tore sputniks
out of the newspapers
and pasted them
on our walls

Poor Laika
dying in space
her frozen eyes fixed
out the port window
like black crystal
chinks in empty
orbits of bone
a broach of wires
pinned to her chest
the harness caped
over her shoulders
she rode over
the throne of Cassiopeia
winking

A popsicle stick man
glared at the dinosaur
tread of my sneakers
sixty feet face up
the elms clawed
at the broken beak
of Triceratops

We were a world then
puzzling some
thing out of no
thing
twisting the cuckoo
clock backwards
till even God
began to fall
into smaller
and smaller
pieces.
THE MAN WHO TRACKED DINOSAURS

The man who tracked dinosaurs followed the duck-billed Trachedon through the dried up Wyoming swamps into the coal forests of Montana, overturning gizzard rocks goose egg stones that ground horsetail stems, scouring rush in the reptile's crop.

Ten miles from the shore of Ekalaka, Trachedon shoveled another wedge of fern his shriveled forelegs bent like a giant mantis.

The man who tracked dinosaurs waited for the beast who-walks-on-two-pillars to print a webbed foot the size of a newborn calf in the red silt.

Five grey buttes into the gumbo his rake nudged the broken skull the pointed tip of one nostril where the reptile smelled the white dinosaur hunter tracking him backwards past desert sage, prickly pear, into the green Jurassic jungle.
LABREA

Diesels sling their heavy tails
up route 23 in the half-light
Crawling on their full stomachs,

I hear their tortuous wails
the thunderous shriek
of a thirty ton animal.

Gears strip and rust
but a bone,
an 8' high left tibia

is a fine calcium stone
pressed together
in the fist of the womb.

A bone is such a fine tool.
Eskimos carved fishhooks
out of a walrus' wrist.

Hitler discovered what marvelous fill
the skeleton makes,
biodegradable, earth soluble,

We decompose, unless-
a freakish temperament
seals us in.

Watertight, airdry
a bone outlives its flesh
by a billion years.

It works best if you fall into tar
pitch glazed over by a fresh rainfall
fatal as a sabertooth tiger's claw.

Labrea lured specimen after specimen in.
It was fashionable to collect
the pieces of a period then,

Cenozoic, Quaternary. She drew
the winged reptile, Pterodactyl
who used to skim over her black waters.
Lighting on the exhausted rib
of Megatherium, the 3-toed sloth,
One leathery wingtip slipped

Pterodactyl was sucked in
a few feet from where
the pregnant Eohippus blundered

Caught by her right cannon bone
she reared and plunged
her belly, hip, and nostrils in.

Now we handle her delicately
as a Ming vase.
Her pelvis threatens to crumble.

We deliver her in seven months.
The bones abort slowly.
Chiseled out, glued,

Wired to a pedestal,
she tiptoes through
a crack in history.

Today, we fence LaBrea off
in the L.A. Hancock Park.
Tourists feed her acorns

And the squirrels squack
if one misses a leap and falls
tail first into the tar seep.

But I feel LaBrea's black gums
sucking the marrow out,
polishing off centuries.

Bone makes such a marvelous meal,
percolated through earth
like rich coffee grounds.

Outside the pits
a marigold sips
at a tibia underground.
KITES
TO MY SISTER, LOOKING INTO MY MIRROR

Some god reprinted my likeness
    five years after
    darkening the original
    and running it off in the rain,
I know you so well.
I do not know you at all.
    sharing the lips, the nose, the voice
Your eyes reach into
    the brain of the earth
    like the roots of a tree
growing uncontrollably
    beneath the ground.

I lie like a seam of sky
    sealing off your escape
I smile when you speak
    of growing  I collect it
    like acres of clouds
and you
    focus upon things
I will never see.
KITES

you were suspended in disbelief
three chalk faces
bobbing helplessly in the road
without arms or legs
to fasten your sorrow
to the earth.

your eyes break open all night long
In my dream
the wind tugs at your fingers
pulling the whole morning down
on my roof.
WHEN THE COWS BROKE

When the cows broke
through the black and white
current fence where
the next door boy
shoved my cousin's
face against the electric
wire, I ran window
to window while cows
shook loose lilacs,
bolted, udders flapping
trailing muddy sheets
tail ends unraveling.

One moon-eyed heifer
wiped her asphalt
nose in Lucky's dish,
chewed tigerlily stems
until my mother shooed
her into the old asparagus
beds where Dad flailed
the kitchen broom
like a scythe while cows
rolled in, crackling
the dry air, rumbling
their heavy sides in the sky.
FOR MY FATHER DROWNED JULY 27, 1968

I want to skip stones with you again. Watch your flat rock strike water, spin out five times before sinking in. I want to walk across Spofford Lake, touch pickerel, catch eelgrass in our toes, puff out our cheeks and gulp like rock bass, wind up all the snagged fish line on snapped off poles, retrieve the rusty hooks, the silver spoons, the daredevils.

I want your daughters who could be anything to be everything, swimmers who bend their elbows like bows, draw back their breaths, and stroke across an ocean.

Father, now you are over my head, beyond ropes. I keep diving and coming up empty again.
DROWNING WITH MY MOTHER

Mother, the river opens at your dark heart
wades a mile and a half through Cyr
to the abandoned bridge where water
drops like an angry voice, rapids
lift like combs to curl your brown hair.

You breathe in water and let out air.
You take the nearest hand
and climb back into the raft.
The fear unfolds like a dead child
inside. You feel your blood
fall through rocks, the water
knocks like hoses against
your open mouth.

Mother, I watch your delta shape
fan out along the beach,
your heart grows underneath,
and shifts its weight like a sandbar.
On two sides the purple gorge rises
the river feeds at the split
between us, you stand at the shore
and wait, while I float out
against the dark current.
WOODRUFF ISLAND

When I fall asleep I walk my uncle's pier
and watch Woodruff Island roll in,
green fir, yellow birch wash in
a silent ship with a hundred branched masts
its prow always turned to the cove
once an amphitheatre and now overgrown
by asparagus fern, lichen, and wet stone.
Its stern pulls away from the $100,000 cottage
Tennessee Ernie Ford bought for a summer home.
Once I swam the half mile to the inlet and back.
The green saw buzzed everytime I rolled my head
underwater I saw the emerald pines feathering
branches winging above me. On the beach
some government stuck a sign, NO TRESPASSING
Violators Will Be Prosecuted. Standing knee
deep on flat stones, I watched the path
I used to walk funnel from spongy star moss
to yellow needles. When I fall asleep
I walk my uncle's pier and watch Woodruff Island
fixed out there like a ship anchored in
the Spofford Lake constellation.
BETWEEN MOUNTAINS

at night the ringtailed
raccoons squeeze
under the window
above my uncle's bed
soaking bread into
a circle of black water,
	heir faces gleam in the flash
their hands are incredible like mine.

in the morning my uncle's
stiff fingers drop
nails I count the pine
ribs of his boat beached
behind the stone house.
THE GENTLEMAN CALLER

A One Act Play
Characters:

MATTIE - Tall, bony woman in her 70's. Her long grey hair streaked with yellow, in a braid looped on top of her head. Wears an old faded smock apron over an ankle length dress. Walks with a cane.

NORA - Mattie's older sister. Wears her short curled grey hair in a fashionable style. Shorter, tiny, thin with a tendency to look somewhat sheepish and dowdy despite her stylish dress.


GRACE - Mattie and Nora's cousin. In her late 50's. Tall, busty. Wears a black mourning dress.

WHITEY - Grace's dead son, who has been institutionalized in the Marcy Mental Hospital for the past 20 years.

MR. CASE - funeral director

POLICEMAN
THE GENTLEMAN CALLER

Scene I Mattie and Nora's house. The appearance of the house and the furnishings should suggest that nothing has changed for the past 40 or 50 years. Everything in the house except for the TV and phone is old fashioned.

(MATTIE and NORA are eating supper. NORA is scraping fried potatoes to the side of her plate)

MATTIE

Now what's the matter with them potatoes? Every night I see ya pushing 'em over to the side of your plate like they was making ya sick ta look at.

NORA

Well, ya didn't have ta always fry them in that grease Theresa brings over, do ya?

MATTIE

(gets up from the table and starts to clear it off)

So now your complaining 'bout the way I cook. Seems like I should be complaining 'bout the way ya eat. Pick, pick, pick, just like some little wren pecking at a worm in the backyard.

(MATTIE picks up the plate which NORA has finished eating from and waves it in front of her nose)

Now look at this will ya, leaving half your potato and ya ain't even touched your liver.

NORA

I ain't hungry tonight. All that grease on the food turns my stomach.

MATTIE

Ya ought ta be happy we got the bacon fat ta fry our liver in.
(MATTIE puts NORA'S plate on the kitchen counter. MATTIE starts scraping the leftover grease from the liver pan into a Campbell's soup can)

With the price of bacon now ya ought to be happy your sister saves the grease for us. Lucky for us Therese's got that ulcer and ain't supposed ta use grease in her food.

(NORA starts to push her chair away from the table)

NORA

Well Therese ain't supposed ta be eating that bacon either. That's what's making her so sick in the morning.

MATTIE

Oh, you're full of what the birds eat Nora. Bacon never kilt my Herbie and he et nearly half a pound a day till he died of cancer and it weren't bacon gave him that cancer. It was the drinking that rotted him out. Ya remember seeing him in the funeral parlor. God, it gave me the shivers everytime I had ta look down at him staring back at me from that coffin like a ghoul. Weren't nothing left of him by the time he died except that ugly little grin.

NORA

Looks like he'd been kissed by the devil.

(The phone rings in the hallway as NORA is talking. For more effect it should ring as she says, "devil." The phone rings several times. NORA does not get up to answer it. MATTIE turns around from scraping the liver pan.)

MATTIE

Ain't ya going ta answer that phone, Nora?

NORA

My boy Jack told me I'm not supposed to answer the phone anymore after them crazy calls I been getting.
(As NORA talks the phone rings another 2 or 3 times)

MATTIE

How many times do I have ta ask ya ta answer that phone, Nora. Ya know I can't move around good wid this arthritis in my hip. Side's it probably ain't even your gentleman caller.

NORA

I ain't got no gentleman caller.

MATTIE

Well, he's a gentleman and he calls ya don't he?

(She looks over at NORA to see what effect her ribbing is having but NORA pretends to ignore her. The phone keeps ringing.)

Ya know, Nora, Betty's supposed ta be calling 'bout what time ta pick us up for Whitey's wake tomorrow.

NORA

She wouldn't be letting the phone ring on the line like that.

MATTIE

Now how would ya know? Maybe she thinks we're upstairs. 'Sides if you don't answer that phone tonight we ain't going ta know what time ta be ready.

(NORA gets off from her chair, grumbling, and starts to squeeze between the kitchen table and MATTIE at the sink)

NORA

I betcha it ain't Betty at all. I betcha you just ...

(The aisle is too narrow and NORA gets jammed against the kitchen chair and her sister at the sink)

MATTIE
Nora, would ya stop shoving me against the sink. You're squeezing the breath out a' me.

NORA

Well, if ya didn't have such a big behind, maybe I could get past ya.

(NORA twists sideways as she grips the metal back of the kitchen chair and manages to slowly shuffle out of her sister's way)

MATTIE

Least I ain't a skinny little thing like you.

(NORA ignores her, walks into the hall and picks up the phone which has rung over 20 times now)

NORA

Lo
Who is this?
No, I ain't interested.
No, I already tol't you I ain't going out to the movies with no man.
I tol't you before my son's on the police force and he's reporting ya. He tol't me he's put one of them tracers on the phone and when they find out where's you're calling from they'll lock you up with all the rest of them crazy people and throw away the key.

(MATTIE is wiping dishes while NORA'S on the phone. NORA slams down the phone)

I tol't ya, Mattie. It was that crazy man calling me again. Says he wants ta take me out ta the movies now. Imagine him calling up an old lady like me.

(NORA reaches down to straighten the back seam in her stockings)

MATTIE

Maybe he thinks you're some beauty queen disguising your voice, Nora.

(NORA walks back into the kitchen)
NORA

I already toltd him I was an eighty year old woman. I
tolt him I wasn't 'bout ta start fooling around with
him or any other man. And I ain't answering that
phone again. I don't care if it's the Lord himself
calling I ain't picking up that phone and talking
with some crazy man. And when he calls here ya
should hang up on 'em right away and not give 'em
ta me.

MATTIE

Well, how am I supposed ta know who's calling when
the fella only wants ta talk ta ya. I ain't never
had no obscene call before, Nora.

NORA

It ain't no obscene call. He was asking me out ta
the movies.

(MATTIE bursts out into snorts of
laughter)

MATTIE

Asking ya out ta the movies, Nora.

NORA

Well, he did whether ya believe it or not.

MATTIE

Bet ya it weren't the movies he asked ya out to at
all. Bet ya ain't said half the things he toltd ya
over the phone.

NORA

It weren't nothing like that at all.

MATTIE

Well if it ain't, you look plenty scairt ta me.

NORA

It was the way he was breathin' like this ...

(NORA starts taking long deep
breaths. She appears visibly scared by her own demonstration of the breathing)

MATTIE

Must be one of them lunatiks. Like that fella on Dragnet spying on ladies undressing in their bedrooms at night and then stealing their panties and corsets when they left the house in the morning.

NORA

Mattie!

MATTIE

Can't see why he'd be spying on an old lady like you less he was pretty crazy. Lessen he was like that Boston Strangler, ya know, real nuts in the nogen.

(MATTIE taps her skull)

I heard he used ta strangle women wid their own stockings. Used ta call 'em on the phone pretending he was from the income tax bureau, make an appointment real official like and then when he got inside their kitchens, he's real polite like ask for a glass of water and when the old lady would get up to fetch him one, he'd quick leap up out of his chair, whip out a piece of hose, wrap it around her neck, and strangle her.

(As MATTIE is talking she snatches up the dishcloth which is lying on the counter and suddenly flings it clumsily over NORA'S neck. NORA screams, and pulls the dishtowel off her neck, throwing it on the floor like a snake. MATTIE starts laughing.)

NORA

For Godssake's Mattie. What are ya trying ta do?

MATTIE

Boy, I ain't seen ya look so scairt since the day that policeman came ta the house wanting ta know if he could check our cellar for that tramp ya seen hanging around.
NORA

Well, it ain't funny. I suppose you don't care if you wake up some morning and find some strange man tearing apart your bedroom, looking for money, wid a knife in his hand.

MATTIE

Leastwise I don't have 'em callin' me up on the phone trying ta make a date wid me. I'll bet you sent your name into one of those dating places where they match ya up and some old coot in the Bellview nursing home is trying ta get ya to shack up wid him.

NORA

I ain't listening ta anymore of your talk.

MATTIE

Well ain't we huffy. I'll bet when I go ta visit my son Robert, the two of you'll have a grand old time of it on the sofa ... 

NORA

I tolta I ain't listening ta anymore of your talk.

(NORA starts walking back into the den again)

I'm going ta call the telephone company right now and have 'em change our number.

MATTIE

You're going ta do what!

NORA

I'm going ta have 'em give us a new number so's I won't be getting anymore of them calls.

MATTIE

Over my dead body you're going ta change that number. I've had the same telephone number for 30 years and I ain't 'bout ta have it changed just cause ya don't want your boyfriend calling ya.
NORA

He ain't my boyfriend!

MATTIE

Well, he certainly don't go calling up asking me out for dates. Maybe it's that new toilet water ya been sprinkling on yourself lately.

NORA

I don't care what you think. He ain't my boyfriend and I'm calling up the phone company and telling 'em we want a new number cause some nut is ...

MATTIE

You ain't doing no such thing. That's my phone, Nora. I pay for it and I ain't having 'em change my number so nobody knows what it is. If you want ta go out and buy yourself your own phone, you go right ahead but you ain't touching mine.

NORA

I might just do that.

MATTIE

Go right ahead. Put in your own phone. See if I care. But you ain't putting it in my den or living-room. If'n you want a phone of your own ya put it in your own bedroom upstairs. Then you can change your number every day for all I'll care. And if anybody calls up on my phone ta talk ta ya, I'll just hang up on 'em.

NORA

Suits me OK. When anybody calls up on my phone asking for ya I'll just tell 'em, I never heard of you. I'll say, "Mattie, Mattie who, ain't no one who uses this phone.

MATTIE

Well, I hope ya get that phone of yours damn quick cause I'm darn sick of ya using mine.

NORA

Well, you can bet your boots I'm going ta call 'bout
gettin' right now.

(NORA walks over to the phone, picks up the receiver and asks the operator for the phone company. MATTIE hangs around the corner listening.)

MATTIE
(whispers loudly)
Ya know Nora, you're supposed to dial them numbers yourself.

NORA
(flags her hand at MATTIE)
Ssh.

(A long silence ensues as NORA listens to the phone ring. Finally she puts it down.)

Guess no one's there. I'll have to call later.

MATTIE

Coulda told ya there weren't be anyone there. Ain't no one working after 5:00.

(Just then the phone rings again. NORA instinctively starts to pick up the phone which she still has her hand on.)

Wait a minute. I'll answer my own phone.

(MATTIE takes the receiver out of NORA'S hand)

Hello?
Oh, it's you, Betty.
Yah, Nora and I can be ready by 9.
Have ya heard where they're burying 'im?
No, it ain't Precious Blood. They're taking Whitey clear the hell out to Sacred Heart Cemetery in Oswego. I can't for the life of me imagine ...

NORA
(interrupts with a loud whisper)

No, they ain't either, Mattie. Grace is having ...
MATTIE
(fans NORA away with her hand)

'scuse me Betty. Now would ya be quiet Nora. How do ya expect me ta hear Betty wid ya jabbering into my ear.

(MATTIE speaks into the phone again.)

No, that was Miss-Know-It-All-Nora, blabbering her mouth off about something she don't know nothing about. Alright we'll be ready 'bout 9 tomorrow morning. Bye, Betty.

(turns to NORA)

How many times have I tol't ya, Nora. Don't go blabbering into my ear when I'm on the phone.

NORA

Well, it ain't Sacred Heart they're burying him in.

MATTIE

And how would you know, Miss Smarty Pants?

NORA

Cause Grace called yesterday when ya was at Roberts and said she'd changed her mind. Said she decided she didn't like the way they lumped ya all together at Sacred Heart. Said they practically buried people on top of each other.

MATTIE

Well, one hole's the same as the other once you're dead ain't it. Long as ya got room enough ta stretch your legs out, it don't make much difference where they bury ya, long as it's a Catholic cemetery.

NORA

Well, I'm certainly not going ta be stacked under somebody else in Sacred Heart when I get buried.

MATTIE

And how the hell are ya going ta know where they bury ya once you're dead?
NORA
Well, they ain't putting me in Sacred Heart that's for sure.

MATTIE
Have yah got that in your will?

NORA
I ain't got no will.

MATTIE
Well, then they can stick ya wherever they please. Look where Pa got stuck. Off in Our Lady of the Blessed Virgin, in the old corner by that new sewage disposal plant the city built. I feel it's my duty to get out there on his birthday every year, but sometimes Nora I think Pa's a lot luckier being 6' under than walking around smelling that air. God it stinks something fierce 'round that cemetery anymore. You'd think they were leaving the bodies out to rot the way it ...

NORA
Mattie!

MATTIE
Well, it's true, Nora. You smelt it yourself. It stinks like a dead body in that cemetery.

NORA
Ya don't have ta keep talking about it, do ya?

MATTIE
You can't hide something by not talking about it. Keeping still don't make the smell go away.

NORA
What do ya think you're talking about it's going to do?

MATTIE
Gonna do nothing. But I sure ain't going to shut my
mouth up just cause you don't like hearing 'bout it.

NORA

And I don't have ta stand here listening ta ya either.

MATTIE

Then why don't ya just close up your ears then. 'Cause I'm going ta watch TV now.

(MATTIE stalks off to the livingroom and switches on the set. NORA stands by herself in the kitchen a moment then follows her sister in. MATTIE sits in an old rocker and NORA takes the overstuffed worn chair with lace doilies covering the arms and back)

Scene II  Next day. NORA is seated in the kitchen sipping a cup of tea. She wears a dark but not black suit, matching shoes and hat, black gloves and purse. MATTIE is wearing a long old fashioned black dress, a black hat with a long fringe of veil nearly drooping in her eyes. They are both seated at the table as the scene opens.

MATTIE

Ain't it almost time for Betty ta be picking us up?

NORA  (takes a look at her watch)

Well it ain't but 10 of 9.

MATTIE

You better quick finish up that tea of yours, then. Likely Betty'll be here any minute. She ain't the kind ta be late. It's the Morrisey blood in her. There weren't a day I can remember I ever got up before Pa.

NORA
'Cept when he was sick he'd lay in bed an hour or two.

MATTIE

Pa weren't sick a day in his life! Likely it was your own self ya was thinking of, cepting you'd lay in bed the whole day if it was up ta ya.

NORA

Well, I ain't still gonna be getting up at 6:00 like you when there ain't no ...

(As NORA is speaking there is a sound of heels clattering outside on the porch, young boys yelling, chanting, "Old Mrs. Rich, she's a witch, flies around on her old broom stick, Old Mrs. Rich, etc., then the sound of splattering eggs)

MATTIE

Sah, Nora. Ya hear that outside.

(MATTIE awkwardly gets to her feet, reaches for her cane, and thumps outside to the porch)

NORA

Sounds like them boys again.

MATTIE
(yells back)

Well, I ain't putting up with this any longer.

(MATTIE goes out the door. NORA remains inside sipping tea.)

(MATTIE yells.)

Ya keep on running ya little hoodlums and don't ya ever come back here again, cause if I catch ya in this yard again, the police are going ta lock ya up.

(curses to herself)

Goddamn boys!

(MATTIE comes. thumping back into the house again.)
Will ya take a look at this Nora!

(She holds a damp, gooey rag under NORA'S nose. NORA draws back. The rag comes from a torn pair of men's shorts.)

NORA

Ain't that a pair of Robert's underdrawers?

MATTIE
(gives her a disgusted look)

That's egg, Nora, raw egg all over the porch screen. And they even threw a couple up on the roof. And how do ya think I'm going ta clean that mess up. It's gonna stick up and rot if we don't get it cleaned up, Nora. I can't get up there with my rheumatis.

NORA

Well, I ain't climbin' up there.

MATTIE

Well, I ain't askin' ya too. Guess my Robert's going ta have ta come down tonight and get it off for it starts ta smell up there. But I know what I'm gonna do now.

(MATTIE throws the rag on the kitchen counter and walks over to the phone and starts dialing.)

That wise-aleck MaKenna boy and his Polack friend think they're so smart, think Mrs. Rich wouldn't call the cops on 'em. Well, they'll find out, when the cops come knocking on their parent's doors.

NORA

Ya shouldna kept their ball on 'em when it rolled on the porch.

MATTIE

I shouldna! What do ya expect me ta do? Let 'em young hoodlums break all my windows. Taught them a good lesson, losing their ball.
NORA

Well, I still think you shouldn't ...  

MATTIE

(waves NORA to be quiet.)

Well, ya keep your trap shut, Nora, whilst I'm on the phone.
Yes, officer I'd like to report the Makenna boy and his wise mouth friend for throwing eggs at my house. Lives at 234 Collamore Av. A real little hoodlum.
Ya should lock 'em both ... That's right officer, raw white eggs, whaddya think they threw, boiled eggs!
That's right it's 148 Murphy. But I got my cousin's wake to go to this morning. Ya would have ta come this afternoon.
Alright officer, bye.

(slams the phone down, stomps into the kitchen grumbling.)

NORA

What's a matter?

MATTIE

Lotta satisfaction them cops give ya nowadays. Gotta fill out a report first. Gotta talk ta me and "survey" the damage for he even sees them boys. Damage, my foot! Don't he know what a broke egg looks like?

(A knock at the door)

Come on in, Betty.

BETTY

(walks in apologizing)

Sorry I'm late Ma, Aunt Nora, but I forget to set the alarm this morning.

MATTIE

Don't make no difference ifn you was early, ya woulda still have ta wait.

NORA

(matter of factly)

Them boys been throwing eggs at the house again.
BETTY

That James McKenna and his friend?

MATTIE

Ya, those two little hoodlums. Called the cops on 'em this time. Lotta satisfaction that gives ya.

BETTY

I told you Ma, you shouldn't have kept their baseball. If you'd have given it back to them all this wouldn't have happened.

MATTIE

(waves her hand at NORA and BETTY in disgust)

Oh the two of you are both alike, always right. But ain't I got the right ta keep what falls in my yard. If'n they was behaving themselves they wouldn'a been playing so close ta my house.

BETTY

Well, I'm not going to argue with you Ma. Are you two ladies ready?

NORA

I've been ready since 8:00. This one here sets her alarm for 6 every morning and wakes me up too.

(NORA starts to get up and follow BETTY out the door. MATTIE remains seated)

BETTY

Come on Mother. I promised Grace we'd be at the funeral home by 9:15 and it's already almost that time now. Listen if you like I'll talk to Jimmy's mother and see if we can't get everything straightened out.

MATTIE

(finally starts to get up. BETTY starts to help MATTIE with her cane)

Oh, don't bother. I'll handle it myself. Handle most
everything else round here myself

(throws a sarcastic look at NORA)

ain't that right Miss-Sit-On-Her-Fat-Rear-End-All-Day.

BETTY

Mother! I've asked you before not to ...

MATTIE

(grumbling again)

Yah, Yah, Yah, I know. Don't hurt poor Aunt Nora's feelings. Just let 'em nag, nag, nag, ya all day. Ain't that what sisters and daughters are for.

(They exit)

Scene III  The Funeral Parlor. The same set can be used, the kitchen being transformed into a waiting room and the livingroom being the room where Whitey's casket is lying. BETTY, NORA, and MATTIE enter the waiting room, talking. GRACE is in the other room kneeling on the bench in front of her dead son's coffin.

MATTIE

It don't look like there's anybody here cept us.

BETTY

Ssh, mother! The wake doesn't start till 10. I just told Grace we come a little early to give her more company.

(The funeral director, Mr. Case comes in. He is impeccably dressed in a black tux, white shirt, black tie, and elegantly slicked back balding hair.)

MR. CASE

Ladies! May I take your coats?

(He starts to help them off with their
coats, BETTY'S and NORA'S first.
Hangs them up during the conversation)

BETTY, NORA

Oh, thank you.

BETTY

Is Mrs. Vicks here yet?

MR. CASE
(indicates the next room)

The bereaved is in the next room

(shakes his head with exaggerated sympathy.)

Oh Ladies, what a terrible shock that must be for her.
Losing her only son, And such a handsome man he was too.

(Takes off MATTIE'S coat and hangs it up. The whole affair is done rather awkwardly. In the middle MR. CASE tries to take her cane to hang up. MATTIE clings fiercely to her cane)

MATTIE

What are ya trying ta do?

MR. CASE

Oh, excuse me madam. I just thought you might be more comfortable sitting down if I took your ...

MATTIE

And how in the hell do you expect me to walk without my cane. Comfortable, my foot, I'll be comfortable tripping over ...

BETTY

Mother! Mr. Case is just trying to help you. Please excuse her, Mr. Case. She's had a rather trying morning.
(BETTY turns to NORA)
Why don't we go in and see Grace?

MR. CASE
Oh, Ladies I would really wait a moment to pay your respects. You know how the bereaved would like to be alone with her loved one for a few minutes before the rest of the family arrives.

BETTY
(somewhat uncertainly)
Oh, certainly.

MR. CASE
(Holds his arms out to NORA and BETTY and seats them. MATTIE sits down by herself.)

Won't you make yourselves comfortable till Mrs. Vicks comes out. If you excuse me now I have a few more arrangements to attend to.

(Exit MR. CASE)

MATTIE
(wrinkles up her nose and waves the air in front of her)
Phew! Smelt like he fell into your toilet water, Nora.

(BETTY gives her mother a disapproving side-long glance.)

NORA
No, he didn't at all. Smelt more like Este de Laude, what Grace used on herself.

MATTIE
Still makes me think he ain't exactly right certain places and I don't mean just up here
(taps her skull)
if'n you know where I mean, Nora.

(MATTIE laughs suggestively to herself)
BETTY

Mother, I wish you'd behave yourself around people.

MATTIE

Whaddya mean? Ain't I behaving myself? Ain't I behaving myself, Nora? Ain't said one word 'bout that short skirt you're wearing. Me, I'd be ashamed to be seen in public showing my knees like that, but then I ain't got the pair o' knockers ya got.

(wrinkles her nose at NORA'S dress)

NORA

Well, it ain't my fault you're so old fashioned. We ain't living in the dark ages anymore like you. People ain't wearing just black to funerals anymore. They's wearing all sorts of colors. Ain't even wearing them old floppy veils like yours anymore.

BETTY

Sides I think it's kind of nice that Nora still looks after herself like she does. Wouldn't do you any harm to look after yourself like that too, mother.

MATTIE

Well, I thank God I got the decency to keep my legs covered up in public.

(She smooths her ankle length dress over her lap.)

Course now if I had a gentleman caller like Nora ...

NORA

I ain't got no gentleman caller.

BETTY

What are you talking about now, Ma?

MATTIE

Als I'm saying is that if'n I had a gentleman caller like Nora I might doll myself up a little too. 'Course seeing as nobody's been calling me ...
NORA

Don't pay no tention to her, Betty. She's jus' trying ta rib me 'bout these phone calls I been getting from some crazy man.

BETTY

Hav you reported those calls to the phone company Aunt Nora?

NORA

I tol Jack about 'em and he says we should change our number but Mattie won't listen to a word of that.

MATTIE

Oh, don't pay no attention ta her, Betty.

(pokes NORA in the ribs)

Why don't ya tell Betty the truth, Nora?

(MATTIE leans over to BETTY in a loud whisper)

Nora's been keeping company wid some widow from the Bellview nursing home. The old coot calls her up every night right 'bout supper. Been asking her out ta the movies lately, ain't that right, Nora.

(BETTY looks puzzled)

NORA

Well, I ain't goin' out ta the movies wis him. An old lady like me. He's got the nerve bothering me.

MATTIE

Oh come on now, Nora. You ain't that old is ya? You still got a few good ... 

NORA

Mattie!

BETTY

Mother! I wish you would stop teasing Aunt Nora. That isn't anything to joke about.
MATTIE

Alright, alright ain't saying another word ta her then about her gentleman caller.

(MATTIE draws out the 'gentleman caller. NORA tried to ignore her.)

NORA

You know Betty I don't rightly remember what Whitey looks like anymore. Here he is my first cousin and I wouldn't know him if he said hello ta me on the streets.

MATTIE

Well he ain't likely to in that casket Nora. Lessen ya know something we don't.

NORA

That ain't what I was meaning, Mattie. I just mean it's been so long since I seen him.

MATTIE

Well I ain't seen him for just as long as you. He's been locked up in Marcy with all them lunies for 20 years.

NORA

Was it that long?

MATTIE

Yep. Be almost 20 years ago this September since Grace came home and found him hanging in the cellar without a stich on except that rope round his neck she cut off. I always told her, Grace you'd be bet­ter off if you'da come in a few minute later after he'd ...

BETTY

(very loud)

Mother! I don't want to hear anymore of this ...

MATTIE

But it's true ain't it. He knew he was going crazy.
Shoulda let the fella hang there like he wanted stead of locking 'em up all his natural life and spending all that money on 'em.

BETTY

Mother, I don't want a word of this to Grace, you understand. She's upset enough already.

NORA

Why was he hanging there naked, Mattie?

BETTY

Aunt Nora, please.

MATTIE

Well, I just won't say nothing ta her cept hello, then. We never got on well anyhow since I told her she was making a big sissy out of that boy 'o hers.

BETTY

Mother!

MATTIE

Well it's true. She was always dolling 'em up in a new suit, telling 'em not ta fight. That ain't no way ta bring up a boy.

(Just then GRACE enters, dabbing at her cheeks with a Kleenex. She is a gushy woman who looks gaudy in her mourning clothes)

GRACE

(sits down)

Oh, Nora, Betty, and Mattie. It's so good to see you. Why Nora I don't think I've seen you since, since your Herbie died in '64.

BETTY

How are you doing, Grace.

(squeezes GRACE'S hand)
GRACE

Oh, I don't know Betty. It was just so sudden. Heart attack they told me at the sanitarium. I couldn't believe it when they first told me. Here he was only 53 and my only child too. You think it's enough a mother has to have her only son locked up to protect himself from ...

(she breaks off in a sudden sob)

BETTY

Oh, Grace. I know what you mean

GRACE

(GRACE stops sobbing. Wipes her cheeks again and looks around)

Oh, Mattie. I'm sorry I didn't even say hello to you

(squeezes MATTIE'S hand)

I haven't seen you in years either. How have you been.

MATTIE

Oh just fine, Grace. I thought we'd all go in together and say a prayer for your boy.

GRACE

(Keeps nervously dabbing at her dry eyes with a Kleenex)

Oh well why don't you three go in first then. I'll just go in and see Mr. Case. There's a few matters I have to clear up with him. You know he's been so nice to me here. Why the first time I went in to see my boy I noticed they had his hair parted on the wrong side and it didn't look a thing like him, so I told Mr. Case and he asked me just how my boy's hair looked and said they'd comb it over to the left side right away and not to worry about anything if I was bothered to feel free to ...

(MR. CASE appears again)

Oh, Mr. Case could I see you a minute.

MR. CASE

Surely Mrs. Vickers. Would you care to step into my
office in the hall and speak with me.

GRACE

Would you excuse me a minute. It's so kind of you to come over early like this Betty, Nora, and Mattie. You don't know what it means to me. So if you will excuse me now. You know I really would go in with you to see my boy but I'd just start balling all over again.

(GRACE presses their hands and goes with the waiting MR. CASE)

BETTY

Oh we understand Grace. You go in with Mr. Case. We will go pay our respect to Whitey.

(BETTY, NORA, MATTIE all rise at once and start into the other room)

MATTIE

She's as gushy as she always was. Bet she ain't laid eyes on Whitey for as long as I have.

BETTY

(hisses)

Ma!

(They walk up the coffin and look in)

NORA

Don't look like a man's been locked away in Marcy for 20 years, do he?

MATTIE

(peers in more intently)

Looks like a girl wid all that rouge and lipstick painted on his cheeks and lips.

(As they are speaking BETTY kneels down to pray, trying to ignore her mother and aunt)

NORA

It's just ta give them some color, like Cary Grant wearing lipstick on TV so he don't look half dead under them movie cameras.
MATTIE

Well, it ain't natural ta doll a man up like that. Ain't his face puffed out though Nora?

NORA

His cheeks is swelled out something awful.

MATTIE

Must be what the medicine done.

NORA

What medicine?

MATTIE

Ya know Nora, the medicine they gives ya in them places ta keep ya from killing yourself.

NORA

I didn't know they did that.

MATTIE

How do ya think they kept Whitey from killing himself them 20 years in Bellview?

NORA

Oh!

BETTY
(tugs at her mother's dress)

Sit down, mother. Are you and Aunt Nora going ta say a prayer for your cousin or are you two just going ta stand there and gawk?

MATTIE

Alright. You ready to kneel Nora?

(NORA nods. MATTIE cautiously kneels supporting herself with her cane. NORA kneels besides BETTY. As they are praying, MATTIE is continually lifting her veil off her nose like she
was swatting a tickling fly away. BETTY gets up first and waits.)

MATTIE
(whispers loudly to NORA)

Done?

NORA

Almost ready.

(BETTY is standing up beside the two kneeling women waiting for them to rise. Both NORA and MATTIE start to rise together. MATTIE straightens up faster carefully pressing herself off the bench with one hand when NORA catches her left heel in dress hem)

Mattie!

(NORA tugs at her sister's purse suddenly forcing MATTIE to grab unto the corner of the coffin to keep her balance)

MATTIE

Nora, let go of my purse. You're gonna make me fall.

BETTY

(spings to her aunt and mother's sides suddenly and takes hold of both their wrists trying to steady them.)

Careful now Ma and Aunt Nora.

(NORA releases her grip on MATTIE'S purse but MATTIE still clings stubbornly to the corner of the coffin as if her hand was clenched around an electric wire. Her wrist shakes violently.)

MATTIE

My God, Nora! What are you trying to do? Give me another fall.
(MATTIE takes a harsh deep breath very much like the breaths NORA took earlier demonstrating "her gentleman's caller's voice. She is visibly angry.)

NORA

I was only trying ta save myself. I didn't mean for ya ta start falling.

MATTIE

You din't mean for me to fall.

(MATTIE cocks her arms against her hips and snatches her other hand quickly away from the coffin)

What was ya grabbing unto my purse for, then?

BETTY

Ladies, come on now. Let's go into the other room.

NORA

(looks down at her knee where her nylon had snagged on the wooden bench. She dabs at the run with the wet end of her finger.)

Oh, darn it all. I got a run in my hose.

MATTIE

Ya mean ta tell me, ya almost break my hip again and all you can think about is your damn stocking!

BETTY

(tries to take her mother by the arm and pull her away. MATTIE plants her feet and stares angrily at NORA)

Mother, come on. People are going to be arriving soon.

MATTIE

Sometimes I just don't know why I ever took you in.

NORA

(flings her head up suddenly. Her
usual bland sheepish expression is replaced by shock and then outrage. She gasps.)

NORA

Took me in! Why you begged me to come and live with ya after your Herbie died.

MATTIE

Begged you!

BETTY

(is all this time desperately trying to stop their quarrelling.)

Ladies please. MA, AUNT NORA!

MATTIE

The day I ever begged you to stay with me would be a cold day in Hell. Why your Herbie left ya such a pauper when he died ya woulda starved if I hadn't taken ya in. Ya'd be begging today if ...

NORA

(puts her hand up to her mouth, tears start to form in her eyes.)

Well I ain't staying around to listen to ya insult me and my Herbie. Why I ain't staying in that, that filthy pigsty house o' yours one more day. I'm gonna pack my bags and leave tonight.

(NORA pulls away from BETTY and runs out of the funeral parlor)

BETTY

Ma, now look what you've gone and done to Aunt Nora. You've got her all upset.

MATTIE

(sniffles, rummages in her pocket-book for a handkerchief and blows her nose loudly.)

Filthy pigsty. So that's what she thinks of my place.

BETTY

If you would only stop picking on poor Aunt Nora so
m much, Ma.

(BETTY takes MATTIE'S arm and starts to escort her out of the funeral parlor)

MATTIE

(starts to blurt into her handkerchief)

Well, I didn't mean for her to go running off like that. I didn't mean for her to ...

Scene IV MATTIE, NORA, and BETTY have returned to MATTIE'S house. NORA is in her room packing. BETTY is sitting with MATTIE in the kitchen, sipping a cup of tea. NORA'S room is off the kitchen. Her door is partially open.

BETTY

Aunt Nora, wouldn't you come out and have a cup of tea with us?

NORA

(yells from her room)

I ain't drinking no tea wid her.

BETTY

Ma, I wish you would go in there and apologize to Aunt Nora.

MATTIE

Why should I? I ain't done nothing I ought ta apologize for.

BETTY

You shouldn't hurt your sister's feelings by saying things you don't mean.
MATTIE

Well, then she shouldn't take 'em ta heart if'n I don't mean 'em. I weren't the one asked her ta leave. Nora's the one takes it into her head I was insulting her. Far as I'm concerned she can stay as long as she likes.

BETTY

(pours her 3rd cup of tea then looks at her watch)

Now Ma, I've got to be going home soon to fix the kids' lunch so I want you and Aunt Nora to act half civil towards each other, you hear?

MATTIE

(says nothing)

BETTY

Now Aunt Nora, please come out and have some tea with us. I poured you a cup. Do you take one or two sugars Aunt Nora?

(NORA walks out of the room, still dressed in her funeral clothes. She carries a small valise)

NORA

I ain't taking no sugars.

BETTY

(gets up suddenly, takes NORA by the hand and tried to sit her down)

Aunt Nora! Where are you going? Come on and sit down. Please have a cup of tea with us.

NORA

Alright. I'll sit down but I ain't taking none of her tea.

MATTIE

Nora! What's gettin' in ta ya? Where do ya think you're going?
NORA

Well, I ain't stayin' here. Maybe I'll go ta Theresa's.

MATTIE

Theres ain't got no room for ya. Sides I ain't never asked ya ta leave, Nora. Als I said was ...

NORA

(as NORA is talking she picks up the teacup and unconsciously takes a few sips)

Als you said was I begged ya ta take me in and ya know that ain't ... 

MATTIE

That ain't what I said. You're the one who said I begged ya ta come live wid me.

NORA

(reaches for the sugarbowl and takes two scoops as she argues)

Ain't so.

MATTIE

Is too.

NORA

No, it aint, no it ain't, no it ain't.

BETTY

(takes both NORA and MATTIE by the arms)

Ladies, Aunt Nora and mother, the both of you are acting like two of your grandchildren.

NORA

Well, could you live wid a woman like her

(NORA points at MATTIE)

insulting ya ta ya face every time ya turn around?
MATTIE

What about me, Betty having ta put up with her nagging tongue? Could ya listen ta her day in and day out blabbing away about her highnesses potatoes being too greasy.

(BETTY is growing more frustrated and angered as the argument continues)

NORA

Listen to the kettle callin' the pot black.

BETTY

(suddenly rises from the table, grabs her pocketbook and starts to head out the door)

Well, I know one thing for sure, I ain't listening to the two of you squabble anymore. If I want to sit and hear two kids arguing with each other all I've got to do is go home and listen to my own.

NORA

Oh, don't go, Betty.

MATTIE

Dont leave on accounta her, Betty.

BETTY

Well, I'm sorry Mother and Aunt Nora but I've put up with listening to your nonsense as long as I'm going to. I'll give you a call tomorrow Mother.

(BETTY leaves)

MATTIE

Ain't no reason for ya ta leave Betty. Now look what you've done Nora.

NORA

Me done. It weren't me made Betty leave.

MATTIE

Supposen it was the Man-in-the-Moon then got her all
upset.

NORA
(continues to sip her tea)

Well, ya got my stomach so upset feels like its
burning a hole inside me, like them ulcers, Theresa
has. Don't think I even feel like I want ta et.

MATTIE

Als you need is one good belch.

NORA

Mattie!

MATTIE

Would do ya a world o' good 'stead of that medicine ya ...

(Knock at the door)

MATTIE

(gets up, picks up her cane and goes
to answer the door)

Bet ya it's that policeman Nora. Tolt 'em ta come this
safternoon.

NORA

Shoulda called my son Jack. He woulda been here ...

MATTIE

Ah Jack don't know his elbow from his fat rear end.

NORA

Mattie!

MATTIE

(opens the door)

Won't ya come in officer. Have ta scuse us. We jus'
come in from a wake, but wait till ya sees what I got
ta show ya outside.

(MATTIE and THE OFFICER walk out the
doors to the back porch as they talk
NORA sips tea in the kitchen)
OFFICER

Let's see now, you are Mrs. Rich and you reported a 234, vandalism at 8:56 this morning.

(he checks his notepad as he follows MATTIE)

MATTIE

Now ya just step out onta my porch and ya can see what I was reporting. Just look at that officer. The goddamn little hoodlums. Threw 'em right up on the roof too.

OFFICER

(hurridly scribbling the information on a pad)

How many boys did you say were involved Mrs. Rich?

MATTIE

There was two. Jimmy McKeena lives at 234 Collamore Ave. and his polack friend, some polasky, wynoski was his name, both two little ...

OFFICER

And how many eggs would you say they threw, Mrs. Rich?

MATTIE

How many eggs! What ya expecting I should do officer put 'em all together again fur ya like I was Humpty Dumpty. I don't care ifn they threw live chickens at my house. I want 'em arrested.

OFFICER

Well, first we'll have to talk to the parents of the boys. Then of course we'll have to find out whether anyone else was present at the time of ...

MATTIE

(She and THE OFFICER start to walk back into the house)

Well I is coming wid ya. I'm gonna make sure they don't get off scot free. Nora, ya stay here and keep an eye on things whilst I go wid the officer here.
OFFICER

That really wouldn't be necessary, Mrs. Rich. You see ...

MATTIE

Als I see is that ifn I want ta see them boys get what's coming ta them I better be there.

(MATTIE and THE OFFICER start to walk out the door)

NORA

Mattie, ya ain't leaving me are ya? I'll come wid ya.

(NORA gets up suddenly to follow. She nearly trips over her suitcase, regains her balance by hanging onto the table, finally steadies herself and goes to the door and looks out the window)

Ya wait just a minute and I'll come wid ya. Mattie! Don't ya go and leave me alone here. Please, MATTIE!

(The phone starts to ring. NORA turns suddenly, very startled and yells back)

Ya stop ringing I tell ya. Ya be quiet. I ain't listening to ya no more. I tell ya I ain't answering ya.

(NORA slowly edge towards the phone in a kind of dazed terror as she speaks)

Ya can stop ringing now cause I ain't picking ya up. MATTIE! I know you ain't Betty. I know who you is ... I don't wanna pick ya up. Oh God don't make me pick ya up. Oh God I don't wants ta pick ya up. MATTIE!

(NORA has gradually moved closer and closer to the phone until she is right next to it. Her hand moves almost involuntarily to the receiver as she slowly picks it up)

Betty, HELLO, hello, is it ya. Is it, no NO MATTIE!